

352 stools, and a rough table or two, with a dresser containing a scanty assortment of coarse earthenware, a spinning-wheel, and a quilting-frame, constitute the furniture of the kitchen. In one corner is a pile of turf for fuel, on which the fowl roost, and above the couples are stored the dried fish, &c., for the winter's use, and the agricultural and piscatorial implements.

415 The domestic utensils consist of the usual large three-legged pot, slung on a crook over the fire, a griddle, a frying-pan, and, perhaps, 352 a quern, a boran or sieve of sheepskin stretched over a wicker frame, and a couple of skids or shallow, circular wicker baskets. The furniture of the bedroom, or rooms, consists of a couple of tent beds; a few chairs and, perhaps, a small table. [There is very rarely a loft 231 to the house. At night the cattle, fowl, and pigs are taken into the kitchen, the pigs being accommodated in a pen beside the fire-place, while the cattle are fastened at the opposite side of the room.

6. *Transport*.—The roads are good, and extend over a large part of [491] the islands, but are only used for foot traffic and cattle, as there are [492] no wheeled vehicles of any description, and all goods are carried [482] either in hampers slung on the back, the usual method of taking home potatoes, &c., or in two wicker panniers or cleaves, slung across the back of a pony or donkey, one or other of which is owned by nearly every family. The harness of these animals is home-made, and of primitive design, the panniers, manufactured from osiers grown on the islands, being slung from pegs on a wooden frame, beneath which, to protect the animal's back, is a thick straw mat saddle. Both sexes ride on the horses behind the panniers, and both adopt the same position, a side-ways posture, the men not riding astride.

[243] The method of taking home the harvest is picturesque; the ponies have cloths hung over their faces to prevent their eating the grain, and are then literally clothed with sheaves, which are hung all round them, and piled up so as to give them the appearance of walking straw stacks.

501 For water transport there are a good many boats of various descriptions, the primary use of which is for fishing; only one, the 505 post-boat, which goes thrice a week to the mainland if the weather permits, being regularly used for transport.

The number and classification of the boats are, it is believed, given correctly below, but it was difficult to get any two accounts to agree.

There are five hookers, seven pooskauns,¹ fifteen currags, one sawl, and about thirty rowing-boats.

¹ An undecked sailing-boat, cutter rigged.

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populated country, the district under consideration is practically 489 isolated, and communication with other parts of the country is carried on by road or by sea. Mails and passengers are carried daily to and 494 from Ballina and Belmullet by a good two-horse (Bianconi) stage-^[205]car; and a similar vehicle, an opposition venture, also makes the journey daily with passengers and light goods. The country beyond Belmullet is provided with mails twice weekly. Goods are conveyed by carts from Ballina, a distance of over forty miles, during the winter and spring, and large sailing boats are sometimes employed 505 carrying heavy goods from Westport. But few wheeled-vehicles are used except by the better-to-do, and in the remoter parts hardly 492 any are employed, turf, sea-weed, &c., being carried in cleaves or pardoges (panniers with movable bottoms, slung over the backs of horses or donkeys). The people, if poor, have to walk; those better off may ride to market. It is common for two to ride the one horse, a man in the saddle and a woman *en croupe*, or both equestrians may be women, in which case, sometimes, but very rarely, the woman in front may ride astride.

The main roads are pretty good, but many of the smaller ones are 491 very little used, except at harvest time or when turf is being got in, and as a result are grass-grown and uneven. Some small fishing hamlets and outlying places are still unprovided with roads.

For water transport there are the sailing boats before mentioned, 505 used for the conveyance of goods from Westport. The form of boat 501 most in use is the curragh, which is manned by three men; it varies somewhat in pattern in different localities.

In the Mullet and the islands 142 curraghs are in use. Very few boats of other patterns are kept, as there are only three second-class boats (yawls), and about thirty third-class. At Portacloy there are about 30 curraghs.

The southern part of the peninsula and the islands obtain their turf supply by boat from Achill and Ballycroy.

V.—FOLK-LORE.

Although poor in so many other respects, Erris is particularly rich 814 in folk-lore, many old customs, traditions, and beliefs, which have died out, or are dying elsewhere, still flourishing there. The legends and tales of the past and many old songs are still current, especially among the older people, who, however, will not readily communicate 609 them to strangers, so that only a resident well acquainted with Irish

167 landscape combined with financial help
 657 of such varied forms that one may see
 the welfare state in action. Inishbofin,
 four miles beyond the coast of Conne-
 [131] mara (10° 10' W. to 10° 15' W.), is sep-
 arated by a strait almost one mile
 wide from the nearest inhabited island,
 Inishark. Some of the neighboring
 311 small uninhabited islands are useful
 sheep pastures and others merely reefs
 132 dangerous to shipping. In calm weather
 these islands rise above deep clear
 waters, but in storms Atlantic waves
 send spray to a height of 300 feet and
 more² and a dangerous swell sweeps
 through intricate channels. The in-
 habitants, farmers and farmer-fisher-
 men are at the mercy of the weather.
 In 1954 the dry spring resulted in a
 short growth of oats and barley straw
 and a feeble growth of potatoes; the
 fishermen's lobster pots were swept out
 to sea, replaced and then swept out
 again; and the hookers could not be
 taken out in waters always dangerous
 but vastly more so when the weather
 consists of an apparently endless series
 of deep depressions.

● 505 Isolation is a major problem, but on
 four days a week in summer and three
 days a week in winter a hooker runs
 from the pier at Cleggan to the island,
 where it is rarely able to berth at the
 pier, so that all passengers and goods
 must be put over the side into a cur-
 ragh and rowed ashore. In winter the
 island may be storm-bound for as much
 as a fortnight at a time, and almost
 [261] every household has a bag of meal kept
 for such an emergency. Special ar-
 rangements have to be made for the
 shipment of cattle; fish can be taken
 for sale to the mainland in rowing
 boats only during favorable weather;
 and no eggs are sold owing to transport

[137] ^{problems} On the cliffs of the island the vegetation is
 halophytic and consists generally of a low sward
 of seapink (*Psamma maritima*).

[p. 203(A)]

BOATS AND FISHING

their skin boats and almost certainly reached Iceland before the Norsemen. An account of the legendary voyagings of St. Brendan speaks of the hides of his curragh as dressed with butter. Port-na-Curaich, on the island of Iona, commemorates the landing of another Irish saint, St. Columba, though one hesitates to accept the tradition that the long mound which may be seen there is the place where he buried his curragh so that he could not return to Ireland. The sea-going curraghs were ideal craft for the Irish raiders who plundered west Britain during and after the Roman occupation: light in weight, of shallow draught and capable of flying over the waves. Probably the plank-built longboats of the Vikings drove the curraghs from the Irish Sea, but its descendants are still to be found in the rowing curraghs of the west coast from Donegal to Kerry. The Boyne curragh is a fossilized relic of an earlier form, if indeed it is not, as Hornell thought, a degeneration product.

But besides the rowing curraghs up to twenty-five feet in length there are also, in Donegal, smaller paddling curraghs eight or ten feet long which seem to stand between the oval river baskets and the sharp-pointed rowing curraghs. In an account of the Rosses in the 1750s we read of the funeral processions to the island of Aranmore in Donegal which comprised as many as sixty or eighty curraghs covered with seal skins.¹ We learn from a description of their construction written nearly 100 years later that the frame of sallies and laths, at that time 'skinned with a hide or tarred canvas' was lashed together with cords of horsehair.² The same writer tells us that cattle were transported in them by lifting an animal into the curragh on its back, with its legs tied, and carrying the loaded vessel into the water. He gives the following example of 'the reckless daring of these islanders. A man and his wife coming out of the island of Aranmore, in a little boat filled with turf, had a horse standing on top of it; with the roll of the sea, the animal was thrown out, and as they were a long way from land, must have been drowned, had not the man cleverly succeeded in getting him into the boat again!' It seems from what records are available that the hides used for covering the vessels,

¹A. B., *The Rosses in 1753*, 202.

²Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 31.

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next to the new one. Built in 1899, the present chapel has a bell tower in its yard, and 500 feet from it on a trail leading north to the common land is a shrine made of cement depicting Christ crucified, which was constructed in 1930. A curate who lives in a rented house in Low Village looks after the spiritual needs of the people of Inis Beag and those living in Inis Thiar. He travels to and from the neighboring island by canoe, although occasionally he takes advantage of the ship servicing the islands when its schedule coincides with his own. The region has been served by a parish priest since late in the eighteenth century following the relaxation of the Penal Laws, but only in 1919 did a curate take up permanent residence in Inis Beag. Prior to that the island was visited by clerics from the parish church and sometimes from the mainland.

It is not known when the first elementary school was established in Inis Beag, but the islanders claim that at least some formal education was provided from the early nineteenth century on, first by landlords and then by the government. Today, a "national school" with seven grades, or "standards," built in 1943, stands on a terrace above the east end of the strand. Its 90 pupils are taught by three instructors, two of whom are local girls and the third, the "headmaster," an outsider. The base of the school building and the low walls surrounding it are banked with accumulating sand, which has created much resentment against the government for having put up the structure there rather than in a more protected location, as advised by the folk. The former school, located next to the watch tower on the promontory above Castle Village, was sold to an islander after it was abandoned, and he partially razed it to obtain valuable building materials.

Three keepers are maintained in Inis Beag by the Irish Lights Service. One or two men and their families made up the lighthouse personnel until 1929, when a severe storm greatly damaged the installation and caused the women and children to be ordered off the island for their safety. The keepers are rotated, with two men on duty while a third vacations for two weeks, and from time to time islanders serve as relief and maintenance workers and help unload supply ships. A symbiotic relationship exists between the folk and the keepers, wherein the former are employed in the above and other capacities by the service, and the latter dispense kerosene and other equipment, it is alleged, to pay for goods and services provided them, such as craft objects which are sold on the mainland for personal profit. The keepers attend church, utilize the shops, and occasionally pay visits to local households, and these visits are reciprocated by a few men and children.

Trails, wells, springs, land areas, and coastal features also figure prominently in the lives of the islanders. Place-names have been attached to each, most of which were created prior to this generation, although fields in certain land areas still are being named as they are manufactured. It is thought that many of the place-names refer to archaic events, persons, and geographical conditions, and legends have come to surround some of them. Others are meaningless in that their constituent words no longer are understood because of either sound shifts or sheer cultural loss. The derivation of place-names is a common topic of conversation, and often prolonged and heated arguments arise over, for instance, the identity of the man after whom a crag is named or the time at which buildings disappeared

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skillful fence makers, and many incorporate various designs into their handiwork by using stones of different sizes and shapes. Stiles or openings in the fences connect a few fields, but gates seldom are employed; a man simply breaks down a stretch of fence to allow a horse or a cow to enter a pasture, then quickly rebuilds the fence. The outsider who believes this to be an easy task usually ends up with surplus stones, a disfigured fence, and maybe bruised fingers when he attempts to emulate the custom. 333

The hundreds of fields are located in dozens of land areas which bear names. Most writers assert that each plot has its own name, but in reality numerous fields are located in any one area. Thus, a man might send his son to dig potatoes in Garden of the Cobbler, that is, in the plot that he owns there; another man might go to milk a cow in his pasture in Garden of the Cobbler. A field will be assigned a new name only if its owner has another one in the same area, and then he might instead call it, for instance, New Field in the Garden of the Cobbler. Some land areas bear the names of persons and animals, others refer to geographical phenomena, while a few are linked to long forgotten historical events. 311 241 103

Over 50 coastal features also are named, from the Harbor of the Churchyard on the north, to Point of the Periwinkles on the south. Most of the place-names refer to rocks, flags, points, reefs, clefts, coves, channels, pools, low cliffs, events of the past, and small strands which mostly have disappeared. The freighter ran aground on a stony reef named Strand of the Sheep. This was a source of wry amusement to the rescued crew, but at one time the beach provided safe footing for sheep driven there to be washed before shearing or sale. One of the best known features is Piper's Rock, which figures prominently in legend. It is named after an island musician who long ago entered a cave above Terrace Village, which supposedly travels under the west sound and connects with another in Inis Thiar, and who never emerged again. In later years, bagpipe music was heard issuing forth from beneath the sea off the rock now named after the luckless fellow. 103 823

Inis Beag has four landing places for small craft along its shores, but none are large enough to accommodate the 550-ton government operated "steamer," which visits the island two to four times weekly. The main pier, also called the jerry, is 300 feet long and 15 feet wide and is protected on its windward side by a wall five feet high. Located just west of the strand (see Fig. 9), it is the third structure to occupy the site; the first pier was built in 1878 and the second in 1913, and the present one is an enlargement of its predecessor. Smaller piers are situated east of the lake, to provide Terrace Village access to the sea, and near the lighthouse. The former is used mostly to unload peat, or "turf," imported by hooker from the mainland and to carry passengers to and from the steamer, and the latter only to transfer supplies from Irish Lights Service vessels which anchor in the east sound. A slip on the west sound near Low Village is used by crews rowing between Inis Beag and Inis Thiar in their canoes. When tourists come ashore in the island, they usually do so for the thrill of riding the *cwarch* and viewing the more accessible historical sites and the much publicized folk; they remain only the hour or two that the steamer is anchored off the strand. Inis Beag has had regular steamer service since 1891, and before that time small sailing boats plied irregularly between island and mainland. 604 505 • 175 178

16: Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

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kelp-making has disappeared, pig rearing has been abandoned, and fishing has become mainly a subsistence pursuit engaged in by only a small number of islanders. Hand in glove with these developments came the enlargement of arable lands and hence an increase in good pasturage, first necessitated by the intrusion of the eelworm and then stimulated by government agricultural supports. Farming became a more time consuming and lucrative occupation, as did the breeding and fattening of cattle and sheep for export, and the keeping of horses and asses expanded to accommodate the increased emphasis on farming. Thus, while the subsistence economy changed but slightly in two generations, the money economy experienced a radical alteration.

At the present time, 59 householders own one or more cattle; 56, one or more sheep; 22, one or more horses; and 58, one or more asses, among whom 8 have 2 asses and 1 a jennet. The government regulates the breeding of both cattle and horses, with the result that only one man is licensed to own a bull and the horses are mares or geldings. Cows are serviced for a 1 pound stud fee in the most inaccessible of fields, where children and tourists cannot observe the breeding of the "beasts." Most of the asses, just as the bulls and stallions, are castrated, but in this case to prevent them from kicking down fences and braying excessively when sexually aroused. Whereas almost all of the horses and asses and a few cattle have been imported from the mainland, the sheep population is Inis Beag sired. For the most part, cattle are grazed on fallowing plots, the few goats on crags at the back of the island, and other livestock on indigenous pasturage.

Cattle owners usually possess a "milch cow," a yearling, and a calf, and cows and bullocks are sold at two years of age. When a milch cow becomes old and "dried up," it either is fattened and sold or, if the price on the mainland is low, butchered and eaten by the householder and his family, usually between Allhallows and Christmas. "Cattle jobbers" visit the island to purchase cows and bullocks, and in 1960 they were paying between 60 and 80 pounds per beast. Excitement prevails on the strand on days when cattle are shipped off. Each struggling animal is pushed out into the sea by a group of men and then pulled to a canoe by a rope attached around its neck; its head is held over the stern transom of the *curach* for the trip to the steamer, where it is hoisted from the water and swung high over the deck and into a hold. Sometimes an islander is forced by circumstances to import a calf, and in 1960 the purchase price of calves at the fair in a nearby port was approximately 20 pounds; a colt cost about 50 pounds and an ass 5.

Probably the most striking difference between cattle rearing on the mainland and in Inis Beag is that island cows are not stabled, but forage and are milked throughout the year in the fields. Between November and March, they are pastured south of the terrace crest on fallowing and the more luxuriant of the indigenous plots, fed hay and rye carried to them from barns and outbuildings, and watered by bucket from neighboring springs which are swollen from winter rains. Men and boys care for their needs during this period, and often spend as many as three hours walking out and back to the pastures twice each day. With the coming of spring, cows are moved to fields on the terraces where women and children can feed and milk them, or men, who are now entering on the busy agricultural and

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[33] which contain a large portion of the natural flora—herbs and shrubs—
[37] of the island. Stone fences delimit many hundreds of plots which com-
[36] pose most of the two-square-mile land surface of Inis Beag.
[417]

[105] The island boasts a post office with radio-telephone facilities, a
[205] "national school" in which three teachers instruct ninety pupils in the
[206] seven "standards," two provision shops with attached "pubs," a former
[871] coast guard station now housing the nurse and a knitting industry which
[759] employs local girls, a lighthouse, and a chapel served by a curate who
[288] resides nearby. Inis Beag lacks electricity and running water, and the
[464] only vehicles are several ass-drawn carts which are able to travel the
[502] narrow, fence-bordered trails. A small "steamer" carrying supplies,
[793] passengers, and mail to and from a mainland port visits the island
at least once each week. That Inis Beag has experienced far less
cultural change than other island communities of Ireland is largely due
to the fact that, in absence of a deep water quay, the steamer has
had to stand off the strand and be met by "canoes." Most of the
tourists who come to the island stay only for the hours that the steamer
is anchored and go ashore mainly for the thrill of riding in the canoes,
which the island men row with consummate skill. Insofar as I can dis-
cover, the inhabitants of Inis Beag are less prone to visit the mainland
than are the peoples of other Irish islands.

INIS BEAG HISTORY AND CULTURE²

[17] The prehistory and history of Inis Beag are recorded dramatically in
[211] a multitude of monuments and artifacts of stone and metal, including
Neolithic axe-heads and kitchen middens, Copper-Bronze Age gallery
grave tombs and burial mounds of earth and stone, an Iron Age prom-
ontory fort, and medieval Christian monasteries, churches, cemeteries,
stone houses, and a sacred well, as well as a three-story tower house
built by the political overlords of the island. Irish nativists claim that
the contemporary folk are lineal descendants of ancient, once civilized

[101] ² The culture described herein is that of 1959-1960 and excludes important
[121] changes which have occurred since then, such as those resulting from the intro-
duction of television, a summer language school for pupils from the mainland,
and free secondary education.